Air America Fires Pilots In Laos

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Agence France-Presse

VIENTIANE, June 30—The two private American airlines operating in Laos under contract to the U.S. government have given notice to 75 pilots as a result of the American disengagement in Laos and the end of U.S. funds for such contracts.

Air America and Continental Air Services Inc. had contracts with the U.S. Information Service, the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Central Intelligence Agency.

Continental's director Robert Brongersma said its fleet of 34 planes will be reduced to 19 next month and 33 of its 68 pilots have been given two weeks notice, with generous severance pay.

He said the pilots' dismissal had been expected since the Laos cease-fire agreement was signed Feb. 21 in Vietnam.

Continental flys light aircraft and medium-sized transport planes.

Air America was more guarded in giving information. But well-informed sources said 42 of about 100 pilots in Laos have been dismissed. Air America's fleet includes 34 planes, many of military type, and 41 helicopters mostly based in Udon, Thailand.

Sources said these aircraft will probably be moved to other countries, possibly in Latin America, and others will be sold so the company can purchase new equipment.

Mechanics, navigators and certain ground personnel will probably also be affected by the loss of U.S. contracts and they do not have much chance of finding similar employment in Laos.

It is also expected that about 350 landing strips, some in isolated mountain regions, will be abandoned.